

Year 12

English Language A Level

Preparation Work

We follow the AQA English Language Specification:

[AS Level English 7701 | Specification | AQA](https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/as-level/english-7701/specification) :

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/as-level/english-7701/specification>

[A-level English 7702 | Specification | AQA](https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/a-level/english-7702/specification) :

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/a-level/english-7702/specification>

Please read through the following pages regarding the course and assessments.

Start learning the linguistic terminology given, which is an essential part of the course, and dive into the studies guide to familiarise yourself with understanding and applying what experts have said on various topics in-depth.

Next, complete the reflective tasks to help you gain a deeper understanding of how the study of English Language develops beyond GCSE, what the linguists are actually studying and the relevance of English language study.

Lastly, please browse through the fascinating books written on the way we use English and watch the videos on different aspects of language study that we will be covering over the two years.

Minimum Course Entry Requirement:

At least GCSE grade 5 in English Language. For continuation to Year 13, grades in Year 12 English Language need to demonstrate potential for A level success.

Course Content

Year 12

In this year you will cover topics that are examined at the end of Year 13 for the full English Language course, and which are on the AS examination for any student wishing to take this at the end of the first year. This specification offers exciting opportunities to explore key language concepts and engage with a range of texts. You will explore key language concepts and engage with a range of texts. You will explore the language we encounter on a daily basis, such as how we judge people's accent, or if males and female use language differently. You will also have the chance to demonstrate your writing skills by creating your own texts in a range of forms and genres, one piece of which, with a commentary, will constitute half of the A level coursework element. For those students opting to take the AS qualification, there will be opportunities to prepare for the examination, which differs slightly from the A level

Year 13

At this stage you will continue to work towards the full A level English Language qualification which offers you opportunities to develop your subject expertise further, including some of the bigger questions about how language has changed over time, current language trends and the stages at which we acquire language early in life. The emphasis will be on lines of enquiry debating different views and working independently to research aspects of language in use in the form of a personal language investigation.

Assessment

Year 12 Coursework: 10% of the total A level.

all students complete a piece of original writing with a commentary (1500 words in total).

AS qualification details (as an option) Other students wishing to continue to the full A level will be assessed by internal examination.

Year 12

Paper One: Language and the individual. 50% of AS qualification. 1½ hours.

Two texts linked by topic or theme. Each text is analysed separately and then the final question requires comparison of the two texts.

Paper Two: Language Varieties 50% of AS qualification. 1½ hours.

Section A – Language Diversity: A discursive essay on language diversity, with a choice of two questions.

Section B – Language Discourses: A directed writing task on attitudes to language.

Year 13

Paper One: Language, the Individual and Society. 40% of total A Level. 2½ hours

Section A – Textual Variations and Representations. Two texts linked by topic or theme. Each text is analysed separately and then the final question requires comparison of the two texts.

Section B – Children’s Language Development. An evaluative essay on children’s language development from a choice of two questions.

Paper Two: Language Diversity and Change. 40% of total A Level. 2½ hours

Section A – Diversity and Change: an evaluative essay on either language diversity or language change.

Section B – Language Discourses: a question requiring a comparative analysis of how texts use language to present the views on a contemporary language issue. This is then followed by a directed writing task linked to the same topic and ideas in the texts.

Y13 Coursework: 10% of total A Level

A language investigation is produced (2000 words), which is the second part of the coursework.

Career Possibilities

There is a wide range of possibilities: English Language is highly valued for careers in the media, police, business, law, social services, civil service and education - in fact, any career where language and communication skills are important. Many universities offer an English Language or Linguistics degree and value A Level English Language.

KEY VOCABULARY TO START LEARNING:

Paper 1 – Meanings and Representations

1. Lexis and Semantics (Word Choices) Why do we use specific words?

- **Semantic Field:** A group of words tied by a shared topic or theme.
- **Connotation:** The associated or emotional meaning of a word, opposed to its literal meaning (*denotation*).
- **Collocation:** Words that frequently appear together (e.g., "fast food").

2. Grammar and Syntax (Structure) What is the effect verb choice and sentence structure?

- **Dynamic / Stative Verbs:** Verbs relating to physical actions (*dynamic*) versus states of being or thought (*stative*).
- **Modal Auxiliary Verbs:** Verbs that express possibility or necessity (e.g., *should, could, must*).
- **Declarative / Imperative / Interrogative:** Sentence types used to make a statement, give a command, or ask a question.
- **Active vs. Passive Voice:** Placing the agent at the front of a sentence versus reducing the agent's focus.

3. Pragmatics (Implied Meaning) The way we use words to influence the meaning.

- **Schematic Knowledge:** The background knowledge a text assumes the reader already has.
 - **Implicature:** An implied meaning that a writer suggests beyond what is literally said.
 - **Intertextuality:** When a text overtly or covertly refers to another text.
 - **Deixis:** Context-bound words that rely on the physical or temporal setting (e.g., *here, now*)
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TASK 1: Text analysis

- Find a piece of writing (book, newspaper or website article, review)
 - Which words jump out at you? Why?
 - What is the writer's point of view? How do you know
 - Is it interesting to read? Why or why not?
 - Can you apply any of the above terminology to understand the writer's choices?
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Paper 1 - Child Language Acquisition

In Year 13 you will learn how children develop speaking & writing skills at an incredible rate.

1. Nativist (Nature)

- **Key Theorist:** Noam Chomsky
 - **Core Concept:** Children have an innate, biological capacity for language. He proposed the **Language Acquisition Device (LAD)**, an internal mental structure that allows children to subconsciously deduce grammatical rules regardless of their native language.
 - **Evidence:** The "poverty of the stimulus" (children speak grammatically well even when adult speech is flawed) and "**virtuous errors**" (e.g., saying "runned" instead of "ran"). These errors show the child is creatively applying grammatical rules they have internalised rather than just imitating others.
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TASK 2: Child Language

- Listen to a 2-year old speak (in person or online). Which words can they say correctly? Which types of sentences are they struggling with?
- Now listen to a 5-year old speak. Are they still making errors? Which type?

Paper 2 focuses on **Language Diversity and Change**. For this you need to apply sophisticated linguistic concepts.

Learn the following vocabulary:

1. Language Change & Attitudes These terms help you analyse *how* & *why* language shifts over time, and how society reacts to it.

- **Neologism:** a newly coined word, an emerging term, or an existing word that has been given a new meaning. (e.g., blends, acronyms, and eponyms).
- **Amelioration / Pejoration:** A word's meaning becoming more positive or negative over time.
- **Overt vs. Covert Prestige:** Overt refers to acquiring status by using Standard English; covert is status gained by using vernacular/non-standard forms to show solidarity with a group.

2. Language Diversity (Social Groups & Regions)

These terms analyse how language varies across groups and locations.

- **Idiolect vs. Sociolect:** An individual's personal linguistic style compared to the dialect of a specific social group.
- **Code-Switching:** Alternating between different languages, dialects, or registers depending on the context.

3. Discourse & Pragmatics

Crucial for exploring *meaning*, context, and implied social power.

- **Convergence vs. Divergence:** Adjusting your speech to become more similar to (convergence) or distinct from (divergence) your interlocutor.
- **Asymmetrical Power:** An imbalance of status in a conversation, often reflected in lexical and grammatical choices.

4. Grammar & Phonology

Use these for micro-level analysis of transcripts and written texts. [1]

- **Elision:** The omission or slurring of a sound or syllable in speech (e.g., "dunno").
- **Non-standard Syntax:** Grammar that deviates from standard conventions (e.g., multiple negation or changing subject/verb agreement).
- **Filler / Discourse Marker:** Words or phrases used to organize conversation or give the speaker time to think (e.g., "y'know", "well").

TASK 3: Think about how you speak and make notes/a mindmap:

- Are there key words you use all the time?
- Have you always used these words, or do they change sometimes?
- Do you change how you speak when you are with different people? (friends, family, school, in different locations)
- If you change, is it conscious? Or does it just happen?
- Does the way you speak reflect your identity?

Paper 2 – Language Diversity Theories: Look up these three fascinating and important studies:

1. William Labov – Martha's Vineyard (1961) – Sociolect/Accent and Dialect

- **The Study:** Labov researched the pronunciation of certain vowels on the island of Martha's Vineyard. He found that younger men, particularly those who wanted to identify as "Vineyarders" over visiting tourists, subconsciously exaggerated their non-standard pronunciation to establish a distinct, localized identity.
- **Why it's crucial:** It is the ultimate study to prove that language is driven by **social identity** and **covert prestige**. It demonstrates that non-standard language is not a "mistake," but rather a deliberate choice to align with a specific social group.

2. Howard Giles – Communication Accommodation Theory (1973)

- **The Theory:** Giles suggested that speakers adjust their language to accommodate the people they are speaking to. He identified two main processes: **convergence** (making your speech more like the other person's to build rapport/show solidarity) and **divergence** (making your speech different to emphasize distance or mark a distinct identity).
- **Why it's crucial:** This is highly adaptable. You can use it in almost any essay—whether discussing regional dialects, age, or occupation—to explain why people change the way they speak in different contexts (like code-switching or conforming to standard forms in the workplace).

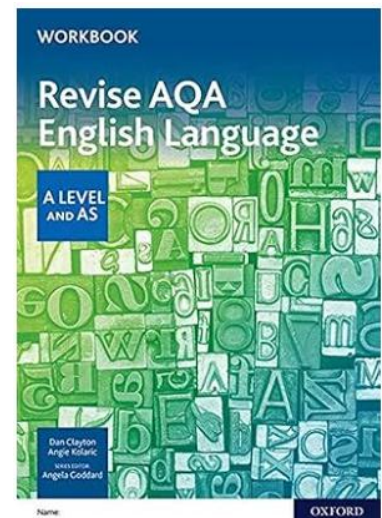
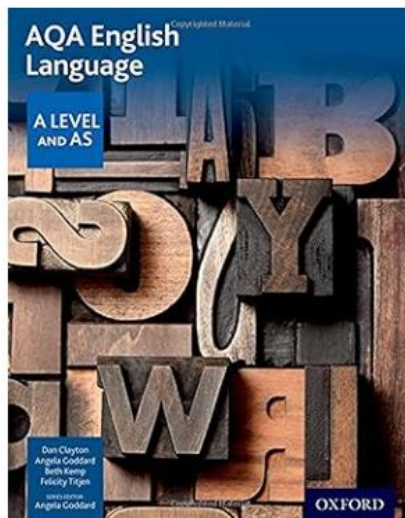
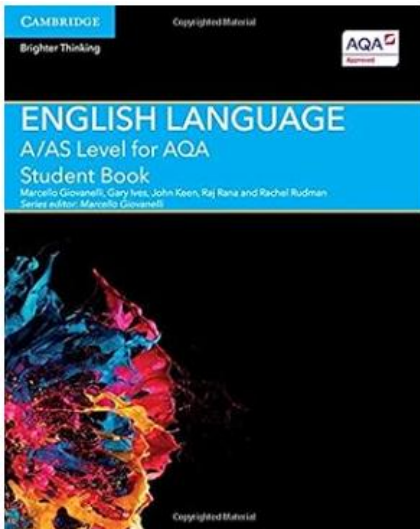
3. Deborah Tannen: *You Just Don't Understand* (1990) – Gender

- **The Study:** Tannen popularized the **Difference Model**, arguing that men and women belong to different "subcultures" and use language for entirely different purposes, leading to frequent miscommunication.
- **Key Findings:** Tannen famously contrasted six styles, most notably **Report vs. Rapport**:
 - Men use talk as a tool to gain status (report talk).
 - Women use talk to build solidarity and intimacy (rapport talk).
- **Why it's crucial:** It is the most vital Difference Theory to know. It offers a "no fault" perspective that completely opposes earlier theories.

TASK 4: Listen in to how your friends and family speak & make notes:

- Do you notice them changing the words, sound, grammatical structures when they speak to different people?
- Can you work out why they make these changes?
- Do you think some ways of speaking are more appropriate for work?
- Do you think you would have to talk in a certain way to get a good job?
- Which of the above theories do you think apply to these situations?

GREAT AQA RESOURCE BOOKS (buy new or second hand):



OTHER BOOKS TO LOOK UP:

Many interesting books have been written recently on what language is and how it works. Below you'll see a list of accessible books which we think you'll find interesting.

Choose one or two & look them up: some will have YouTube snippets, others you may be able to 'look inside' on Amazon.

- *Words on the Move* by John McWhorter
- *The Life of Slang* by Julie Coleman
- *Because Internet* by Gretchen McCulloch
- *Don't Believe a Word* by David Shariatmadari
- *You Are What You Speak* by Lane Greene
- *Talk on the Wild Side* by Lane Greene
- *The Language Wars* by Henry Hitchings

Interesting videos to watch on YouTube:

[Where did English come from? - Claire Bower](#) :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEaSxhcns7Y>

[One Woman, 17 British Accents - Anglophenia Ep 5](#) :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyyT2jmVPAk>

[Language and Gender](#) : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPbMFt0sCbI>

[Interview With a Two-Year Old](#) : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hnmfi-8df0>

[The Best of Trevor's Accents - Between The Scenes | The Daily Show](#) :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWl61kpFEAA&t=760s>

